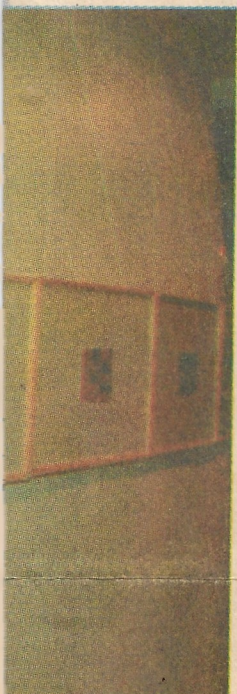


Return of the reclu



GANESH SHIRSEKAR

THAT evening in 1997, walking up the steps of the White House to receive the prestigious National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, sarod legend Ustad Ali Akbar Khan's thoughts were probably far away. Maybe they dwelt on his first accolades, from the mouth of his father and guru, Ustad Allauddin Khan: "I am so pleased with your music that I, in a rare gesture from a guru and a father, will give you the title Swara Samrat (Emperor of Notes)."

Padmavibhushan Ali Akbar Khan is turning 80 and Mumbai honours him

On the occasion of Ustad Ali Akbar Khan's 80th anniversary, the city and her musicians celebrate the sarod legend, finds out

Renuka Suryanarayan

on December 15, at the Rang Bhavan, with a concert by this musical recluse. He has been away in the USA for more than 25 years. Yet he has done Indian music proud, with his world-renowned music school in California spreading our music far and wide.

Born into a family that traces its gharana to Mian Tansen, Ali Akbar Khan was invited by Yehudi Menuhin to first perform in the US in 1955. He was responsible for both the first western LP recording of Indian classical music and the first televised performance of Indian music, sowing the seeds for the wave of popularity of Indian music in the 1960s.

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He's been nominated several times for the Grammy too. However, has he received his due? Is he restricted to the shores of California while others have overtaken him in popularity here? Leading musicians of the city share their thoughts on the maestro.

"I have evolved listening to his music. With just one stroke of the fingers on the sarod, he can bring visions of divinity"

On his legacy

Pandit Viswa Mohan Bhatt:

"His inspired improvisation makes him stand out as a leader of the Maihar gharana. The *alaap*, *jhod*, *jhala*, the use of *thihai*, all come out in individualistic ways. The Ali Akbar Khan College of Music in California has given rise to a lot of interest in the gharana and in Indian music abroad."

On his life's work

Ustad Zia Fariduddin Dagar:

"He is responsible for spreading Indian music far and wide, through his disciples. Everything about him is commendable. Honours have not eluded him. He is world-renowned but age

does place restrictions on relentless pursuit of achievements."

On his performances

Pandit D K Datar:

"I have heard him performing since the '50s. Amongst the most memorable were the performances in a Mumbai at the Pandit Deodhar School, at Cawasji Jehangir Hall and Sur Singar Samsad, at Marwadi Vidyalaya. If I have to sum up his performances in two words, emotional and sentimental are the words I would choose."

On his rewards

Parveen Sultana:

"I have evolved listening to his music. He should have been honoured with the Bharat Ratna long ago. With just one stroke of the fingers on the sarod, he can bring visions of divinity. He's a very happy man. In the US, he once came over to hear Ustad Dilshad Khan playing and invited us to his place, and he himself prepared Bangla fish specialties and *payesh* for us. He is a contented man and a great human being."

On his aura

Pandit Jasraj:

"My many interactions with him are unforgettable. Undoubtedly, Ali Akbar Khan is the musician of the 20th century."

All Akbar Khan got Grammy nominations for the following albums:

- Shree Raag (1970)
- Raag Misra Piloo (1983)
- Then and Now (1996)
- Legacy (1997)
- Passing on the Tradition (1998)